



**November 2005**  
**Manfredi Beninati**  
**Lorcan O'Neill**  
**Rome**

Manfredi Beninati is one of only four Italian artists included in the central exhibition at the Venice Biennale (through the 6<sup>th</sup> of this month); as such, his paintings, collages, and sculptures are under close scrutiny in Italy.

This talented young artist from Palermo emerged on the scene only recently, and in his second solo show in Rome, he continues to address childhood, memory, and nostalgia. His reference points are extremely personal, and he draws from a variety of Italian sources, such as the vivid expressionism of the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century painter Antonio Ligabue and the intense literary reflections of Italo Calvino.

Beninati's sculptural series "Baby Bookmaker" (2005) is inspired by the work of Milanese sculptor Medardo Rosso. Like Rosso, he abolishes precise contours and uses solid materials in a painterly, impressionistic manner. He coats his figures in waxlike drips of white resin, with splashes of pastel pink and baby blue that are evocative of a nursery. Sometimes he fuses human forms with their surrounding environments. One work depicts an infant with a litter of puppies at his feet trapped in a dreamscape of leaves, twigs, and flowers. In another sculpture, a small child is entangled in the vines, as though the vines, as though the vegetation has become carnivorous.

More wild plants encroach on domestic situations in Beninati's "Rescued Pictures," a series of oil paintings of scenes salvaged from memory. One shows a garden growing into a plush, slightly creepy Sicilian parlor through a window, disrupting an airless atmosphere of lace, brocade, and gilt.

In *Palermo* (2005), a handsome young man sits on a lawn while the hazy forms of five pink swans loom behind him. This winsome, limpid self-portrait shows the life of the artist as the fable of "The Ugly Duckling." - Jonathan Turner